DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 557 CG 028 669

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TITLE Gender-Roles, Power, and Condom Use in Adolescent Dating Relationships.

PUB DATE 1998-08-17

NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (106th, San Francisco, CA, August 14-18, 1998).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Dating (Social); Disease Control; Empowerment; Females; *Sex Role; Sexuality; Social Influences

IDENTIFIERS *Condoms; Sexually Transmitted Diseases

ABSTRACT

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) have a disproportionate and more devastating impact on women than men; adolescent women are at the greatest risk for acquiring STDs. However, promoting consistent condom use among female adolescents involves dealing with complex socio-cultural factors, including deep ambivalence regarding sexuality in general, women's sexuality in particular, and adolescent girls' sexuality in specific. This cultural ambivalence comes into play in dating relationships where differences in the allocation of power and responsibility often make it difficult to effect important sexual decisions such as consistent condom use. Specific attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions that distinguish between couples who use condoms consistently and those who do not are explored. It is hypothesized that couples who are egalitarian in their attitudes and behaviors and who share power equally are more likely to consistently use condoms. This project used self-report, interview, and observer-coded interaction data to study gender role attitudes and behavior, power in verbal interaction, emotional power, decision-making power, and condom use. Although difficulty was encountered in distinguishing between consistent and inconsistent users of condoms, findings are summarized in nine brief statements. The next steps in this research program are presented. (Author/EMK)

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Gender-roles, Power,and Condom-Use in Adolescent Dating Relationships

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Sexually transmitted diseases have a disproportionate and more devastating impact on women than men (Wasserheit & Holmes, 1992). Among women, adolescents are at the greatest risk for acquiring STDs (Institute of Medicine, 1997). Yet, sex researchers have noted that promoting consistent condom-use among female adolescents involves dealing with complex socio-cultural factors. One pervasive socio-cultural factor is the deep ambivalence regarding sexuality in general, women's sexuality in particular, and adolescent girls' sexuality in specific (Rostosky & Travis, in press; Welsh, Rostosky, & Kawaguchi, in press). This cultural ambivalence filters down to the gender roles enacted in the context of the dating relationships of adolescent women. Despite evidence that egalitarian relationships between men and women are increasingly valued, women are still socialized to take responsibility for controlling male sexual behavior and using condoms to prevent pregnancy and sexually-transmitted disease. Often, however, this responsibility is not accompanied by the structural or interpersonal power resources to effect important sexual decisions such as consistent condom use (Quina, in press). In this study, we attempted to discover some specific attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions that distinguish between couples who use condoms consistently and those who do not. Specifically, we hypothesized that couples who are egalitarian in their attitudes and behaviors and who share power equally are more likely to consistently use condoms.

Method

Participants. Sixty-one target adolescents and their romantic partners participated in our study. Target adolescents were 18 or 19 years of age and were located through high school year books and newpaper listings of recent high school graduates (n=37) or through freshman level psychology courses (n=24). The length of dating relationships ranged from four weeks to five years (median= eight months).

Most of the particants lived with two parents (72% of girls and 57% of boys). Although many of the participants held part-time jobs (49% of girls and 28% of boys), almost all were enrolled in either high school or college (80% of girls and 74% of boys). The couples in the sample were primarily European-American (90% of girls and 93% of boys), with the remainder being comprised of approximately 2-3% each of Native American, Asian, African American, and Hispanic individuals.

Procedure and Measures. As part of the larger study on adolescent romantic relationships, each couple was scheduled for a total of 4 ½ hours of data collection which included structured interview, video-recall, and questionnaire segments. This project used the following self-report, interview, and observer-coded interaction data.

Gender-role attitudes and behavior. Attitudes toward traditional sex roles were assessed using mean scores on the 4-point likert, 12-item Attitudes Toward Women Scale for Adolescents (Galambos, Petersen, Richards, & Gitelson, 1985). Higher mean scores (range 1-4) indicate more egalitarian attitudes. As an indicator of gender-role behavior, questionnaire items assessed each partner's perception of who most frequently drove the car and paid for dating activities and who initiated/curtailed sexual behavior.

Power in verbal interaction. Couples were videotaped having two 11-minute conversations. One of these conversations involved discussing their own views about parenting teenagers. The second was a discussion of a hypothetical moral dilemma concerning issues related to sexual decision-making in romantic relationship (Gilligan, Kohlberg, Lerner, & Belenky, 1971) which we modified slightly to fit contemporary language norms. For each conversation, couples were given instructions and a written description of the discussion topic, then we left them alone to interact. Two trained coders watched the two video-taped conversations for each of the sixty couples and

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independently determined whether participation in the conversations was egalitarian or dominated by one partner. Couple members who controlled the conversation by their greater participation were considered the dominant, or more powerful partner. Cohen's Kappa for interrater reliability was .74, indicating a high degree of agreement between coders.

Emotional Power was assessed using structured intimacy interview data (Orlofsky, 1993). Trained coders listened to couple members' audiotaped interviews and categorized the interviewees into one of four groups based on each participants' perception of their relative dependence on the dating relationship. Coders determined whether couple members perceived themselves, their partners, both couple members, or neither couple member as concerned about being too dependent in the relationship. Fifteen tapes were coded by all four coders; kappas computed for each possible coder pair ranged from .60 to 1.0 (X=.77), indicating adequate interrater reliability.

Decision-making power was assessed globally by asking couple members who most frequently makes decisions on important matters. An additional question asked couples' perceptions of global sexual decision-making.

Condom-Use. Questions from the Sex Knowledge and Attitudes Test for Adolescents (SKAT-A; Lief, Fullard, & Devlin, 1990) were used to assess sexual behaviors including condom use.

Results

Gender role attitudes and behaviors

Attitudes toward women

	Mean*	S.D.
Males	3.30	.42
Females	3.58	.33

*Note. t(1, 59)=4.98 p<.001

Who pays for dating activites?

Informant	Percentage in each category		
	Male	Female	Equal
Male**	57%	8%	35%
Female**	54%	8%	38%

Who drives?

Informant	Percentage in each category		
	Male	Female	Equal
Male**	64%	21%	15%
Female**	60%	22%	18%

Who initiates sexual intercourse?

Informant	Percentage in each category		
	Male	Female	Equal
Male**	44%	2%	54%
Female**	47%	8%	45%

Who decides when to curtail sexual activity?

Informant	Percentage in each category		
	Male	Female	Equal
Male**	10%	32%	58%
Female**	5%	45%	50%

** Note. Chi-Sqare analyses signficant p<.001

Power (Decision-making)

When it comes to decisions about sex, who has the final say?

Informant	Percentages		
	Male	Female	Equal
Male**	17%	27%	56%
Female**	3%	31%	66%

Power (ObservedVerbal Interaction)

Who dominated the video-taped conversation?**

Male dominant	Female Dominant	Egalitarian
27%	17%	56%

Condom-Use

Informant	Percentage in each category		
	Consistent	Inconsistent	no sexual intercourse
Male**	16%	67%	17%
Female**	15%	60%	25%

Who usually makes the decision about important things?

Informant	Percentages		
	Male	Female	Equal
Male**	25%	10%	65%
Female**	11%	10%	79%

Power (Perceived relative dependence)

Who is concerned about being too dependent on the dating relationship?

Informant	Percentage in each category			
	Male	Female	Both	Neither
Male**	20%	21%	14%	45%
Female**	6%	34%	19%	41%

** Note. Chi-Sqare analyses signficant p<.001

Summary of Findings

- Egalitarian attitudes were significantly higher in the girlfriends than in their male partners.
- Both boyfriends and girlfriends adhere to traditional gender role behavior in that boyfriends were significantly more likely to drive and pay for dating activities.
- Although half of the dating couples indicated that the roles of initiating and curtailing sexual activity are equally shared, in the remaining half of the couples, the male was more likely to take the initiator role and the female the gatekeeper role.
- The majority of couples perceive themselves to be egalitarian in both their global decision-making and sexual-decision-making. Of those who did not perceive decision-making to be egalitarian, the boyfriends were more likely to see themselves as being the decision-makers on "important matters" and both the boyfriends and girlfriends were likely to see the girlfriend as having the final say in matters pertaining to sex.
- Observers rated over half of the couples egalitarian in their interactions. The remaining couples were more likely to be male-dominant couples.
- Most of the couples did not perceive an imbalance in emotional dependence. Of those who did perceive an imbalance, males were just as likely to see themselves or their girlfriends as the more dependent couple member. The girlfriends, however, were more likely to perceive themselves as more dependent than their boyfriends.
- The majority of the couples who were engaging in sexual intercourse reported that they did not use condom consistently.

- One-way ANOVA indicated that gender role attitudes were not significantly different among condom-use groups
- Chi-Square analyses indicated that gender-role behaviors and power are not significantly different among condom-use groups.
- Post-hoc analyses indicate that ..

Conclusion

This project describes gender role behaviors and attitudes in a sample of late adolescent couples. It also examines some indices of power in global decision-making, verbal interaction, and relative dependence. Though an alarming percentage of the couples engaging in sexual intercourse reported that they do not use condoms consistently, our measures on power and gender-role behaviors could not discriminate between those were and were not consistent users. Because romantic relationships have been found to be heavily impacted by sociocultural scripts, rituals, and gender roles, it is important to examine these variables as weseek to understand sexual behavior and sexual risk-taking in adolescents and young adults. The next step in our own research program involves qualitative analyses of the conversations described above. By using the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, we hope to better understand this complexities of the intimate relationships that can enhance or undermine our physical and psychological health and well-being.

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This paper was presented as part of a symposium entitled, Integrating Feminist Research and Practice (R.J. Ackerman and M. E. Banks, Co-Chairs) conducted at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, August 17, 1998, San Francisco, California.

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This research was supported by a fellowship award to Sharon Rostosky from the Sexuality Research Fellowship Program of the Social Science Research Council with funds provided by the Ford Foundation, and by an NIMH B/START award and The University of Tennessee Professional Development award to Deborah Welsh.